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SUBJECT: RADICAL IMAMS EXPELLED FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY GLOBAL ISSUES CHIEF SUSAN GARRO FOR REASON
S 1.5(B) AND (D).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: The last of the three radical Eindhoven-based Muslim clerics that Immigration and Integration Minister Verdonk ordered deported in June 2005 had left the country by year's end. Verdonk accused all three of tolerating the recruitment of terrorists within a mosque and inciting violence. This is the first time the Netherlands has expelled imams. The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism told Charge February 15, that the GONL is considering expelling others who preach hatred and violence. An imam in The Hague says that the city's mayor threatened him with expulsion proceedings if he did not tone down his fiery rhetoric. The government, concerned that foreign-born and trained imams are a threat to national security, has established a Netherlands-based imam training program.

End of the Line for Eindhoven Imams

¶2. (C) In mid-June, Verdonk announced that she had signed deportation orders for the three Eindhoven imams on grounds that they were a threat to national security. They were accused of advocating violence through their militant, anti-Western sermons. All three were associated with the al-Fourqan mosque in Eindhoven, widely considered one of the most radical in The Netherlands. The Dutch intelligence service publicly acknowledges it monitors al-Fourqan along with five other mosques and cultural centers in the Netherlands. Local officials claim that al-Fourqan has attempted to change its image and become more open to the local community since GONL officials charged that clerics at the mosque were actively contributing to the radicalization of Muslims in The Netherlands.

¶3. (S) The three imams appealed their expulsion orders. One imam--subsequently identified as Galal Osman Ahmed Kehil, born on August 19, 1966 in Saudi Arabia of Palestinian descent--quickly withdrew his appeal and departed in June, telling authorities that he did not want to return to The Netherlands. The Government announced December 1 that a second imam, Eisha Eltayeb Bersham--also known as "Abu Tareq" or "Abu Tariq"-- would be expelled, following the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) rejection of his appeal of the Minister's expulsion order. Bersham, a Sudanese-born cleric with Bosnian citizenship, soon departed to avoid formal expulsion. National Counterterrorism Coordinator Joustra told us in early January that the third imam had also departed the Netherlands for Kenya in December. According to police sources, the third imam was Kenyan national Mohamud Mohamed Mohamud--born on December 29, 1971. Joustra did not offer any further details about the three imams expelled. During a 15 March conversation, Joustra told the Charge that

the GONL was pleased with the outcomes in the case of the three imams. He added that the GONL was considering whether to expel other radical, foreign-born imams.

Imam in The Hague Warned to tone it down

¶4. (SBU) Another imam, Sheikh Fawaz, of the As Soennah mosque in The Hague, notorious for his fiery rhetoric and questioned for his role in radicalizing his followers, claims that city officials warned him to tone down his messages or face expulsion. VVD Parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali tried to press charges in late 2005 against Fawaz for allegedly making threats against her, although the Public Prosecutor's Office ultimately decided there was not enough evidence to prosecute the case. In the wake of this incident, the mayor of The Hague met with Fawaz, who claimed the Mayor told him to moderate his sermons or face deportation proceedings. Fawaz told reporters that he "refused to be a slave to any(one) other than Allah," and that "the brothers of the As Soennah mosque asked (him) to continue (his) Friday sermons."

Imam Training and Controversial Legislation

¶5. (C) To counter the prevalence of foreign-born and foreign-trained imams in The Netherlands, the GONL has set up an imam training program at the Free University in Amsterdam. The first classes began in the fall of 2005. The majority of the students enrolled in the classes so far are women, who are ineligible under Muslim law to become imams. Another college will begin an imam training program in the coming academic year. The impetus for Netherlands-based imam training is a proposed law by Verdonk that would ban all foreign-born clerics in The Netherlands by 2008. Embassy

THE HAGUE 00000368 002 OF 002

interlocutors have told us they suspect the law will not pass as it may violate EU human rights directives.

¶6. (C) Comment: Dutch government officials are seized with countering what they perceive is the negative influence of radical, foreign-born imams on Dutch Muslim communities. Officials would prefer Dutch-born imams to foreign-trained ones, and suggest that these imams know Dutch society and culture better than those from another country. However, the law prohibiting foreign imams seems unlikely to pass parliamentary scrutiny, and the Netherlands-based training programs have thus far proven unpopular with those in training to be imams, limiting their potential effectiveness. The government's "imam problems" are unlikely to go away quickly.
BLAKEMAN